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UNCLAS RANGOON 000945

SIPDIS

BANGKOK FOR MATTHEW FRIEDMAN, USAID AND BANGKOK ESTH

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TAGS: [TBIO](#) [SOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#) [NGO](#)

SUBJECT: THE WHO JOINS GOB TO FIGHT HIV/AIDS, TUBERCULOSIS, AND MALARIA IN BURMA

REF: A. RANGOON 0369

[B](#). BANGKOK 5053

[1](#)1. Summary: Dr. Jack Chow, Assistant Director-General for the World Health Organization for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (HTM), called on the COM on July 21 to discuss his visit to Burma during which he met with the GOB Minister of Health and other health officials, announced 92 million in new funding for Burma to help combat the spread of HTM, and discussed the WHO's "3 by 5" global initiative for combating HIV/AIDS. End Summary.

[1](#)2. WHO Assistant Director-General Dr. Jack Chow (former U.S. AIDS envoy) told the Chief of Mission on July 21 that earlier in the week he had met with GOB Minister of Health Dr. Kyaw Myint to announce that Burma is to receive a Global Fund grant, totaling 92 million over the next 5 years, to combat the three target diseases of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Chow commented that the GOB has made progress in admitting that there is a serious HIV/AIDS problem in Burma and that "now, no one denies AIDS exists here." Chow said that Kyaw Myint welcomed international support to combat HIV/AIDS, and the Health Minister also communicated how much he had valued a 2003 CDC visit, adding that the GOB would very much welcome another visit in the future.

[1](#)3. According to Dr. Chow, the Health Minister said he was "stunned and jealous" by the number of INGOs operating in Thailand, which he had observed firsthand after attending the International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, and indicated that he was open to advice and support from such international groups. (Note: in a previous conversation between COM and MOFA Political Director General U Thaung Tun, the DG expressed concerns that the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) would result in a "counter productive" proliferation of NGOs in Burma, per ref A. End Note). Dr. Chow opined that the minister's "rhetoric was ahead of his (GOB) team," but said that support from the WHO would give the minister a "deliverable" for fighting HTM, which would help him garner support from his GOB counterparts.

[1](#)4. Dr. Chow went on to discuss the WHO's "3 by 5" treatment target and said that part of the aid Burma receives will be to implement this program, in conjunction with the greater HTM program, to combat these three "global diseases of poverty." According to Chow, there are plans in the works to hold a signing ceremony in Rangoon to initiate the grant agreement, possibly sometime in the next month, and he is hopeful that Richard Feacham, Executive Director of The Global Fund, will attend. Dr. Chow also hopes to return to Rangoon for the initiation of the program. The grant to Burma will be administered through the UNDP, which will be the principle recipient and manager for the program.

[1](#)6. Comment: The Minister of Health's positive response to the WHO is encouraging in the fight against AIDS, as is the substantial funding from the Global Fund. However, infrastructure problems, a lack of proper medical facilities, and lingering issues over confidential testing may hamper efforts to treat patients. The WHO's "3 by 5" program also aims to strengthen health systems and technical assistance in-country, a necessity in Burma with its meager health facilities. The GOB's growing openness toward discussing treatments and prevention for HIV/AIDS is also good sign, particularly in a country where, until recently, condoms were illegal and government denial made the disease all but unmentionable. End Comment  
Martinez